

BACK-TO-SCHOOL SHOPPING WITH IZZY THE TAILOR

... a Knish, and a Tape Measure

by Joe "Kirsch" Curcio

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More than a half-century after my Catholic grammar school days, a rainy September morning still brings back the unmistakable echoes of Sister David's classroom welcome:



St. Cecilia's school, Brooklyn

"Please hang up your coats, place your galoshes in the wardrobe, and stand in place for the Pledge of Allegiance and morning prayers."

That same rainy day pitter-patter also brings back memories of the dreaded back-to-school outfit shopping trips to Herzog's - the "husky kid" clothing store in my Brooklyn neighborhood. It also gives me an abrupt reminder that I've apparently been on a diet since at least 1967.

Herzog's - and Izzy the tailor with a tape measure draped around his collar and a nubbin of soap in hand to mark the legs of my pinned pant cuffs. Ever the "*kibitzer*" joking and babbling and more than willing to offer advice to my father on where we could get *"a beautiful pastrami on rye, a delicious knish, and a nice cold Dr. Brown's cream soda."*

This neighborhood family-owned clothier specialized in back-to-school chubby kid-wear for us unique husky, burly, stocky boys who were most likely destined to a future of slip-on loafers and a morning regimen of statins.

Normally, this preschool fall splurge would begin with my father and me stopping at Moe's who still sold pickles out of a wooden barrel on Havemeyer Street. That was usually followed by the two of us splitting a giant hot dog from Gottlieb's over on Roebling - who, according to Izzy, made a brisket so tender *"even bad news could wait."* Mind you, none of this really helped very much with the back-to-school garments fitting or the eventual required letting out of my new black trousers.

In reality, this trip should have been simply buying some black pants, a few crisp white collared shirts and a couple of green clip-on ties. But by the early 1970's, St. Cecilia's - like many Catholic grammar schools began shifting away from strict uniform policies and inching toward more relaxed styles.

Most of my friends, shopping at "regular" stores like Sears, and Woolworth, were now getting to choose red and yellow blazers, avocado-colored shirts and platform shoes. I, on the other hand, inevitably ended up at Herzog's getting a very dark blue suit and those shiny black shoes usually reserved for the deceased at a wake.



Joe's dark blue suit

To this day, from carrying the baggage of being the kid who hadn't seen much of the high side of the seesaw, I still go with the "*widow-at-a-bar-mitzvah*" black-on-black look. The only time I dabble with color and fashion is when I put on those snazzy Italian guy socks, which incidentally go very nicely with the shiny black wake shoes.

Still, today after many Septembers and back-to-school shopping trips, I've come to be content with my conservative wardrobe - and with the realization that the apple, or perhaps the knish, didn't fall far from the tree.

You see, here I am some fifty years later on this rainy fall morning still in Brooklyn and just a few blocks away from my alma mater - wearing a fairly conservative dark blue sport jacket. Avoiding any treacherous tangles of dangling shoelaces, comfortably in a pair of black slip-on Sketchers. Realizing that those back-to-school shopping trips weren't so bad after all.



The tailor

Other than having to stand there on that creaky wooden platform listening to Izzy and my father debate the "snap factor" of a good kosher frankfurter versus a stick of Sicilian salami, back-to-school shopping was an enjoyable, cultural and educational experience! After all it was during those shopping trips to Herzog's where I learned there is, in fact, a direct connection between the cured meats, kosher potato-based products, and Jewish-owned haberdasheries.

Now as I assess my "Good Old Days" memories of back-to-school shopping? - to my recollection...they were delicious!

ABOUT JOE “KIRSCH” CURCIO

Joe “*Kirsch*” Curcio, native and current resident of Greenpoint Brooklyn New York spent 45 years in broadcasting and entertainment for ABC Radio/TV and National Public Radio. Retired, Assistant Director of Engineering. He has been called *the Garrison Keillor of the East River*. The New York Daily News referred to him as *the thumbs and fingers erecting the virtual borough of Kings*. He was the webmaster of Greenpointusa.com, once Brooklyn’s most popular website getting over 350K *hits* per month and home of The *Greenpoint White-Wall*, an early version of Facebook for Greenpointers!

He is the self-published author of “*Ah-Shpet: 101 words you’ll need to survive the neighborhood*” and “*The Welcome to Greenpoint Manuscript*”, released in the early 90’s. At the time it was written it was the first “book” about Greenpoint to be published in 45 years.

With writing and music as a passion in his retirement, Joe generates over 2K monthly audience interactions on combined social media platforms as well as his website at www.GreenpointMusic.com. He recently has celebrated over 60K streaming media plays of his music and audio/video antics. He maintains a 55% engagement rate on Facebook as well as a 74% retention rate on YouTube.

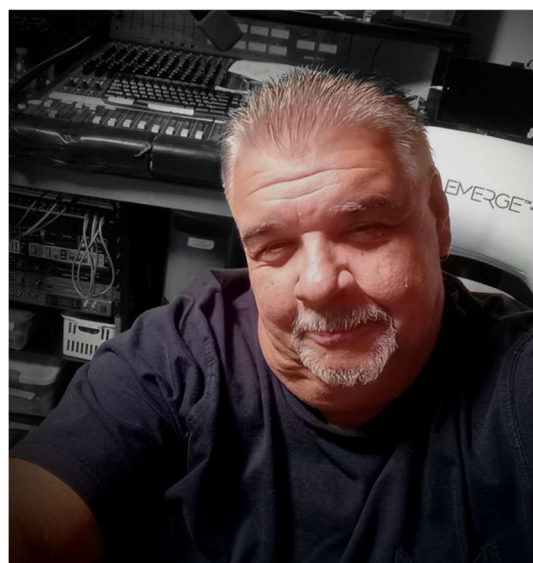
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